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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/17/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MO](#)
SUBJECT: WESTERN SAHARA: PROMOTING AUTONOMY, BUT NOT YET A
PLAN

REF: 06 RABAT 2254

Classified By: Charge Wayne Bush for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Moroccan Government (GOM) is in the throes of a campaign here and abroad to sell its notion to provide autonomy to Western Sahara. Domestic consultations have targeted parliament and political parties, the GOM has not yet, however, reached more than the broad outlines of their plan. In Washington, as they have done in Paris, London and Madrid, the Moroccan delegation will likely ask for our support and our views, so they can be incorporated into the plan. Consistent GOM claims that the plan has Sahrawi approval through CORCAS, itself a non-representative body, are belied by the apparent absence so far of input from any Sahrawis beyond the small circle around Kalihenna, although they have begun some consults in the territory. Expecting rejection on the part of Algeria and the Polisario, the GOM appears to be concentrating its effort more on convincing the UN Security Council than the Sahrawis. We understand they may have adjusted their stance on talks with the Polisario while in Paris. We should continue to insist that broad and transparent consultation is necessary for a credible plan. End Summary

¶2. (C) On February 2, Royal Counselor Mohammed Moatasim briefed PM Jettou, the heads of the upper and lower houses of Parliament, and CORCAS Chairman Kalihenna Ould Er Rachid on the general outlines of the Royal proposal for autonomy in the Sahara. According to an official communique, details were not discussed, but the general lines were mentioned. PM Jettou in turn briefed the party heads, committee chairman and Saharan notables, according to press. Other government leaders are in process of briefing parties and civil society. In addition, there were some civil society briefings on the proposal in the Sahara itself. The NGO's and some of the political parties, including the PJD, were also to be discussing the ideas with a broader range of Sahrawis. According to press accounts, no negative reaction has been reported from inside Morocco or Moroccan administered territories--they say the ideas have been widely welcomed.

¶3. (C) Curiously, there has been no mention of the CORCAS as a vehicle for this effort, despite the fact that various government spokesmen have claimed that CORCAS endorsement of the plan, as proclaimed by Kalihenna, embodies Saharan endorsement. (Note: It is not clear that most CORCAS members even saw a plan. See reftel. End note.) Kalihenna himself instead has focused recently on criticizing POLISARIO diversion of aid funds in Tindouf and their planned 31st celebration.

The Outside:

¶4. (C) The big push began to promote the "broad outlines" of an autonomy plan overseas. The Moroccan delegation was headed by Interior Minister Chakib Benmoussa, MOI Minister-Delegate Fouad El Himma (King Mohammed VI's most trusted aide), MFA Minister Delegate Taieb Fassi Fihri and Intelligence Chief Yassine Mansouri. While this is not as formally high level as the delegation that made the last such round in October, it is more influential, containing the key foreign policy figures and Royal advisors. Press and French Embassy sources report that, in Paris, the Moroccans reportedly presented only the "grandes lignes" of the autonomy proposal and not the plan, although Chirac may have initially mentioned a plan, according to press. The Chirac statement inspired a storm of protest from the Polisario and appeared to be walked back a bit. Following the meeting with the FM, media here reported the French called the proposals "constructive." (Comment: By recent standards of Franco-Moroccan relations this seems to us not a particularly strong endorsement, although we defer to Embassy Paris. End Comment.) In Europe at least, GOM efforts to promote the autonomy offer extend beyond the governments. The leader of the formerly Communist PPS announced he was planning to tour Europe in March to lobby Euro-leftist groupings (Note: those traditionally most sympathetic to the Polisario.) Several other political parties committed to lobby their European party counterparts, including the USFP and Istiqlal.

More Plan in DC?

¶5. (C) On the margins of a meeting on Iran (septel), MFA DG for International Affairs Azeroual told Polcouns that the USG could hear "something more" in Washington. He was unwilling to amplify and appeared unaware of such additional details himself. He said they would respond on the twelve subject

issues previously raised by the USG. He also indicated that the delegation would be seeking USG counsel on a diplomatic strategy.

Comment:

¶6. (C) Even if more elaborate than their European presentations, it seems clear that the plan the GOM delegation brings to Washington will not provide much detail.

In recent days, the GOM appears to have heard our message and begun shopping the plan more widely in the territory. However, the plan still cannot be described as the result of broad consultations with the Sahrawi.

¶7. (C) The Moroccans have also indicated to us and others that they expect Polisario and Algerian rejection of the proposals and that we should in some way endorse their effort, even before a real proposal may be on the table. Because of public expectations regarding autonomy created over the past several months, we suspect the Moroccans could seek to implement an autonomy plan unilaterally if necessary. They may seek our support for this course of action.

¶8. (C) We believe that the current U.S. position in favor of broad consultations with the Sahrawi, before a plan is formally tabled, remains valid. There are some indications that a real autonomy plan may be of some appeal to the Saharans, but the existing confidence gap remains the greatest obstacle to broad acceptance. The Moroccans should also move to build confidence among the Sahrawi community, by enhancing observance of human rights and reducing police presence. An open, public debate on autonomy provisions remains the best way to develop a plan that can win the hearts and minds of the Sahrawis and allow the Moroccans their goal of international validation of their possession of the territory. Morocco should be given credit for having consulted with its domestic political parties and apparently obtained their support. The GOM may have valid concerns about how an autonomy plan will mesh with its other decentralization efforts. We agree that Algeria remains key to a settlement and direct contacts should be encouraged

between Morocco and Algeria, as well as with the Polisario,
building on the recent reports of flexibility on this points.

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Bush